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NEW CONCEPTIONS OF THE CHRIST

To how many men and women, nowadays, is the personality of Christ a clear and vivid mental image? How many could convey it to others,



CONCEPTION OF THE CHRIST
By G. Hitchcock

in the terms of any medium whatever? Of these, how many happen to be painters of even moderate powers? These are pertinent questions, because ten new pictures by American artists, including John La Farge, Kenyon Cox, Gari Melchers, Will H. Low, Frank Vincent Du Mond, Frederick S. Lamb, George Hitchcock, Joseph Lauer, Charles C. Curran, and William H. Crane, have been placed on view in New York, and challenge attention. The canvases, under the title "Conceptions of Christ," were to be seen at the Harmonie building, 43 West Forty-second street, on payment of a fee. The enterprise is that of the Exhibition of American Arts Company, a Cleveland organization, which commissioned these life-size pictures over a year ago for a series of shows in many cities.

To Renaissance painters and sculptors, there was a stimulus, a freshness of viewpoint, in portraying the Christ, due to the spread of new and conquering religious thought, and the sudden acquisition of an enormously multiplied power of expression. These conditions do not now exist. Religious opinion has grown broader and more tolerant, but the accepted outline of the character and purposes of the Saviour has long been virtually fixed. And in figure painting, the artists of to-day have yet to surpass the great Italians and Lowlanders and Germans of centuries ago.

It is only the very rare painter from whom may now be expected any original vision of Christ, since even the tradition of His outward appearance has hardly varied. Genuine religious fervor is scarce in any of the arts.

In music, Sir Edward Elgar, with his superb and uplifting choral setting of Cardinal Newman's "Dream of Gerontius," and his equally sincere though less completely inspired "Apostles," is an isolated and remarkable figure. In religious sculpture, the historical, the theatric and the sentimental divide the field.

In painting, the union of the exalted nature of a Watts or a Segantini with artistic powers matching theirs at their best is excessively rare. The interpretative value of Holman Hunt's "Light of the World," for example, greatly over-balances its worth as a work of art. There is a nearer approach to equality, on a high plane, of these dual requirements, in Dagnan-Bouveret's "Christ at Emmaus" or in Leon Lhermitte's "Christ Among the Lowly," lately acquired by the Metropolitan Museum. Edouard Manet's splendid modeling of the Saviour in an important canvas often shown at the Durand-Ruel galleries may not escape the charge of theatricism; like Verdi's famous "Manzoni" Requiem, which hints broadly at operatic effects, the treatment is not perfectly in accord with the theme.

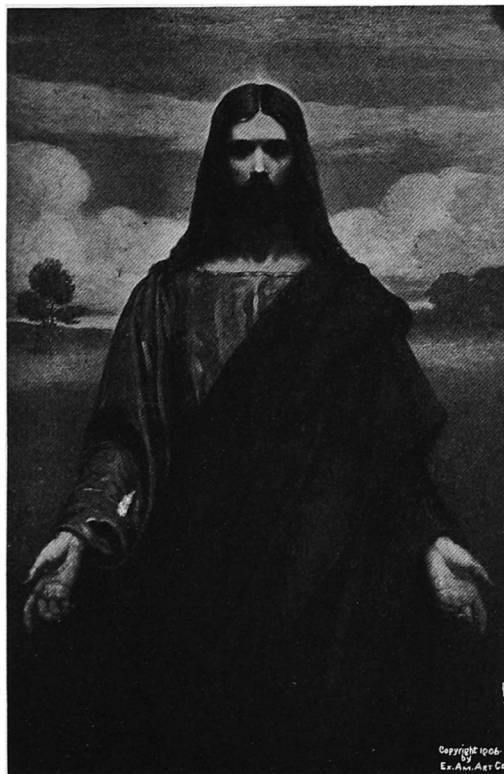
When looking at Tissot's numerous pictures of Christ, the observer is struck by their ethnological plausibility, their accurately measured flow of religious feeling, and by their lack of beauty. Munkacsy, with his elaborate and ingenious "Christ Before Pilate," is only a few removes above Gustave Dore. The realism of Millais's "Carpenter Shop" has been improved upon by Fritz von Uhde, who revives the naive practice of presenting the Saviour in the peasant garb of to-day, in Germany, as certain of the early painters made Him a north Italian, a German, or a Lowlander — an odd license of the artist.

When all is said, however, there is hardly a recent painting of the Christ



CONCEPTION OF THE CHRIST
By Frank V. Du Mond

that communicates the fire of conviction that burned in the hearts of the masters and of those for whom they worked. This goes to show that it is a task for the few, for one painter out of ten thousand, and that he must be



CONCEPTION OF THE CHRIST
By Kenyon Cox

impelled, not by material interests but by a force from within that overrules all other considerations, if he is to succeed in his artistic enterprise.

In the "Conceptions of Christ" exhibition not one of the pictures, unless it be that of Gari Melchers, suggests a spontaneous and personal expression of the artist. Mr. La Farge's beautiful canvas is head and shoulders above the rest in pictorial accomplishment, but despite its elevation and spirituality of type, the face of the Saviour wants forcefulness and conviction. The observer cannot fail to enjoy the beauty of color and the

admirable painting of draperies, but he will miss, perhaps, the relish that marked the painter's work in the large decorations recently done for the Minnesota Capitol, and he cannot feel the impact of a thought that would not rest until it had found utterance—an utterance to impress the world.

Mr. Melchers shows a weary and stricken Christ, dark-haired and clad



CONCEPTION OF THE CHRIST

By Will H. Low

in a coarse robe like a German or Russian peasant. Mr. Melchers lives in Munich and this is a natural mode of expression to him. American painters cannot find, at home, any recognizable peasant types from which to make such studies. The lack of these, and of distinctive and appropriate costumes for those who live and work on the land, has been, by the way, a positive deprivation to American art. Melchers has painted the head and shoulders of his subject with breadth and simplicity. His work carries a definable idea.

Mr. Curran's large, standing, auburn-haired figure surprises by its strength but repels by its hard eyes, its worldly look, its inelastic style. Mr. Lamb's "Old and New Jerusalem," with the standing Christ connecting the two, insistently suggests a Municipal Art Society project, and the figure itself is devoid of freshness and appeal, in color or movement.

Mr. Kenyon Cox's single figure is, like all his work, to be taken seriously. But it falls far below the level he has reached in recent portraits of Emil Carlsen and Appleton Clark, for example, and it bears a strange but unmistakable likeness to the painter himself — surely an odd puzzle in psychology lies here, for Mr. Cox is the last man consciously to do such a thing.

George Hitchcock's Christ has the traditional face and build followed by Wolfram in "Tannhauser" and Amfortas in "Parsifal;" the countenance is not wanting in meaning, nor in a certain restrained beauty, but neither in idea nor treatment is it of the first interest. William H. Crane has put sacramental earnestness into the agonized figure in the Garden of Gethsemane, but the painting is sadly unattractive in texture and weak in design.

Mr. Lauber, Mr. Low and Mr. Du Mond have summoned action and movement to their aid. The first shows a conventional but well-composed figure, with hands upraised and mouth about to speak. It is of more than average interest. The other two show Christ with the woman taken in adultery. Mr. Low's setting is stereotyped and unconvincing; Mr. Du Mond's composition is personal and of quiet power. The face of the Saviour has an unwholesome hue, hinting at the theatric, but the woman at his feet and the two other figures are solidly painted and contribute significantly to the scene. It is really a piece of good genre painting.

SAMUEL SWIFT. (Courtesy New York Evening Mail.)

Apropos of the pictures above discussed the views and aims of the artists themselves will be of interest to the reader. They are given herewith:

WILL H. LOW.—In essaying to portray the figure of Christ, one is struck at the beginning by the complete omission throughout the New Testament of any reference to His physical appearance. Hence one logically presumes that, coming as a Man to men, His figure and face were devoid of aught that was visibly supernatural. On the other hand, there has been evolved an accepted type of which many and varied instances have served the artist throughout the Christian era, though a more simple interpretation has appealed to me. My own effort has been to depict His appeal to our charity of thought and judgment. Of the type of Christ, I can only say I have sought to express a Man compassionate and just, gentle yet strong — one whose thoughts have left a certain impression of nobility upon a face which otherwise might pass unnoticed among such as knew Him as the Son of Joseph, the carpenter—the lowly Nazarene.

KENYON COX.—I have painted a general, rather than a specific or

personal, conception of Christ. It is the Saviour in the plenitude of his earthly ministration, crying to a weary world to come unto Him for rest. I have striven to impart an impression of strength and serenity to the face, and have conceived the character in the decorative, rather than the dramatic spirit.

FRANK VINCENT DU MOND.—I have chosen to treat this subject in a dramatic rather than a decorative manner. By robing the Saviour in white, against the dark open portal of the synagogue, I have endeavored to portray a forceful serenity which, while human in outward expression, is divine in its subtler suggestiveness. The woman in terror of her accusers crouches at the feet of the Saviour, while to one side, in the shadow, a self-centered Pharisee reads the Mosaic law. This, with the female figure in an attitude of denunciation, is intended to typify the narrowness and bitter scorn of the dogmatic Church.

GARI MELCHERS.—I have painted an Ecce Homo in the mediæval, romantic spirit. The face is upturned and agonizing, the coloring being in a blue and sombre minor key; but, instead of the crown of thorns, a golden halo encircles the head, symbolizing the divine hope of the Resurrection, not an abiding sorrow.

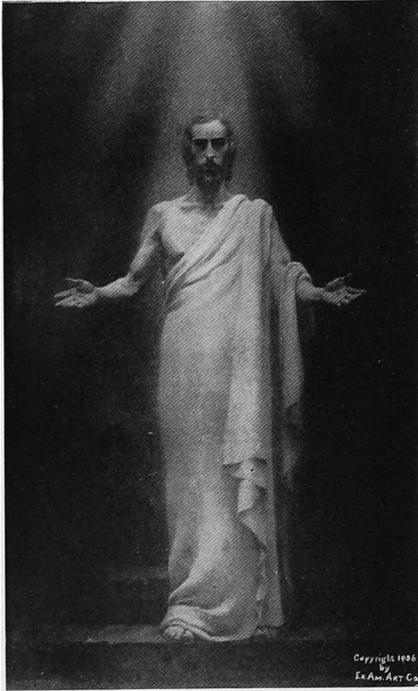
GEORGE HITCHCOCK.—In painting Christ in Gethsemane I have depicted the Saviour at early morn, after His night-long vigil and prayer on the Mount of Olives. His face is misted with the divine calm of renunciation, while the spring sunshine filters through the trees and falls in bright



CONCEPTION OF THE CHRIST
By F. T. Lamb

patches on the flower-starred hillside. This moment in His life has appealed to me as best suited to artistic treatment.

JOHN LA FARGE.— I have striven to portray Christ as the worker and man, choosing that special moment when He was addressing the multitude on the Mount of Olives. The white-robed figure is standing in the shadow of a tall rock, such as is common, according to my personal observation, to the locality. While not attempting to interpret a dramatic moment, my endeavor has been to foreshadow, in the face and figure, something of the sadness and agony which were to come.



CONCEPTION OF THE CHRIST
By Charles C. Curran

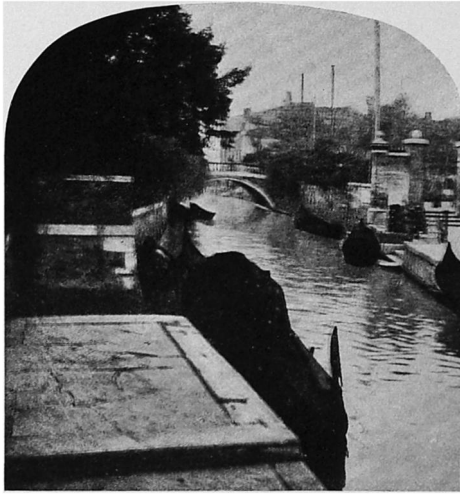
FREDERICK LAUBER.— What has impressed me most in painting this picture are the spiritual power and quietness of the Saviour — the giving of self, and the love, mercy, and charity He brought into play, especially for the oppressed and outcast. This has seemed preferable to any scene from His ministry accompanied by accessory figures — the Man of Sorrows traditional visionary figure — remote from men. As for my success, it is, of course, for others to say.

CHARLES C. CURRAN.— In "Come Unto Me" I have attempted to represent an ideal of the universal Christ, whose chief characteristics are a loving compassion and manly strength — moral, mental and physical. The lean muscular figure, the hair parted on the side, the upright pose and the facial expression reflect those qualities. He stands in a subdued descending light symbolical of the watchfulness of the Heavenly Father. Scars in the palms indicate that his earthly mission is over and that he stands in his final attitude toward mankind, with the hands extended in compassionate invitation.

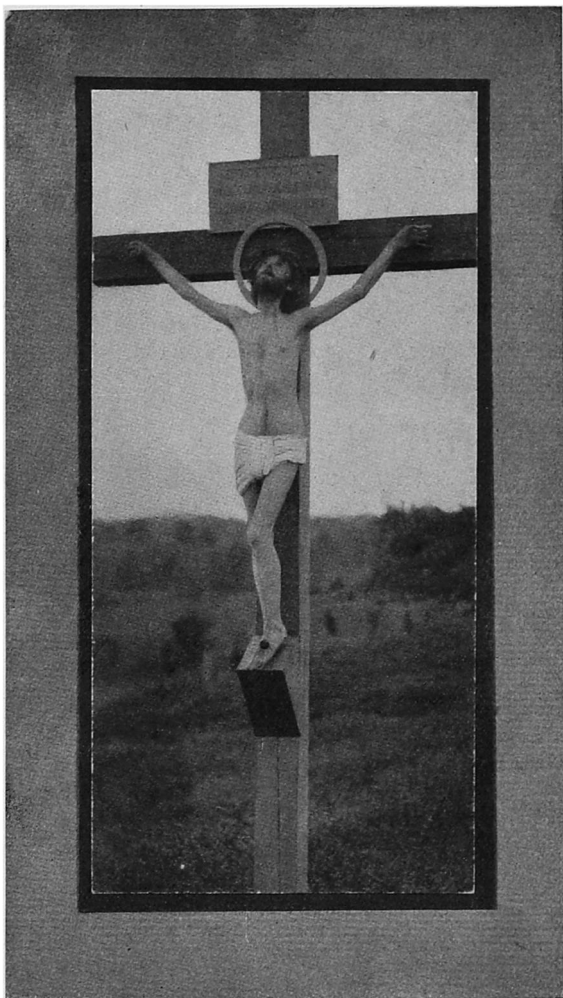
FREDERICK S. LAMB.— I have represented the Christ on the mountain, with Jerusalem at his feet. The time is late afternoon, and he has gone

to the mountain for meditation and prayer. While intent on saving the Old Jerusalem, there comes to Him a vision of the New. This is shown in the picture behind the head, forming a cross in the sky suggestive of sacrifices to be made in order to achieve redemption for the world. The ideal appealed to me from His saving sinners, the individual personified, but in this picture I have endeavored to suggest the larger idea which, to my mind, is more in keeping with modern thought — the saving of the city, or, in other words, the community.

R. N. C.



RIO SAN JOSEPHIE, VENICE



CRUCIFIXION
By F. H. Day
(See article on New Conceptions of the Christ)

